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INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8063  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0007  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ FEB 9253  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5944  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1296  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6584  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4304  
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UNCLAS BOGOTA 000695

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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA'S PRO-TPA UNIONS TO FORM THEIR OWN LABOR  
CENTRAL

¶1. SUMMARY. On February 14, representatives from over 60 unions who support the U.S - Colombia Trade Promotion Act (TPA) proposed forming a new labor group (central) as an alternative to the three main labor confederations that oppose the TPA. The 60 unions -- which represent more than 45,000 workers -- said the existing confederations do not represent all members' interests. They plan to lobby for permanent access to U.S. markets and better workers' benefits. Leaders of the three existing confederations dismissed the group, saying there was "no room" in Colombia for another labor central. The pro-TPA group expects its central -- which is subject to fewer incorporation requirements but functions the same as a confederation -- will include members from unions and other labor federations, as well as individual workers. The organizers hope to form the labor central by August. End Summary

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PRO-TPA UNIONS WANT THEIR OWN LABOR CENTRAL  
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¶2. At a February 14 meeting, representatives from over 60 pro-TPA unions discussed forming a new "labor central" as an alternative to the three existing labor organizations that oppose the TPA. The group claims to represent over 45,000 workers in the food and beverage industry, fruits, minerals, metals, flowers, textiles, and sugar sectors, as well as public services employees. The group includes some union representatives currently affiliated with the three main existing labor organizations -- the United Workers' Central (CUT), the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CTC), and the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) -- as well as independent unions. They plan to form a new "labor central" by August.

¶3. The representatives said they share the existing labor groups' goals of strengthening the right to strike and reducing the effect of workers' cooperatives on unionization rates, but disagree with the confederations' stance on the TPA. Some recently traveled to Washington to lobby in support of the TPA. Ana Lucia Rojas, President of Sinaltraflor, a large flower workers' union, said the CUT, the CTC, and CGT are more concerned with "making political points and waging ideological battles" than protecting workers' interests. Rojas said sectors like hers depend on access to foreign markets. Another representative said the central would reach beyond the TPA to work with the GOC and

employers to boost productivity and seek increased workers' benefits.

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EXISTING LABOR ORGANIZATIONS REJECT THE PLAN  
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¶4. CUT President Carlos Rodriguez issued a statement threatening to expel member unions that defied the confederation leadership's authority. CTC President Apecides Alvis said his confederation has no plans to meet with pro-TPA union leaders. CGT President Julio Roberto Gomez took a more moderate stance, saying the CGT would meet with its pro-TPA member unions to discuss what would be best for organized labor as a whole. Still, he said there is no room in Colombia for another labor central, adding that a new labor group would only weaken workers' interests. Gomez claimed the new central was being propped up by the GOC. The Ministry of Social Protection (MSP) said the GOC played no role in organizing these labor leaders, stressing that they came together out of mutual interest.

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CENTRAL EASIER TO FORM THAN A CONFEDERATION  
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¶5. Gomez predicted the pro-TPA group would not reach the legally required number of ten federations needed to form an official labor confederation. Carlos Sierra, a leader of the pro-TPA group, said they are forming a labor central instead of a formal confederation to avoid the ten federation requirement. MSP confirmed that the requirements for forming a labor central differ from those for creating a confederation, but said a central and confederation have

effectively the same rights and privileges. Rhett Doumitt of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center agreed that forming a "looser" central of federations, unions, and individual workers would exempt organizers from incorporation rules required of a confederation.  
Brownfield